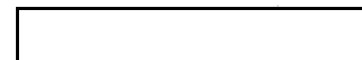


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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
18 March 1966

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
FURTHER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION
CONTAINED HEREIN IS **NOT** AUTHORIZED

State Dept. review completed

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Approved For Release 2007/02/08 : CIA-RDP79T00826A000500010003-7

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HIGHLIGHTS

The military Directorate in Saigon today decided to adopt a hard line toward the political demands of the Buddhists. Buddhist leader Tri Quang stated yesterday that Thieu and Ky had promised to announce the formation of a constituent assembly which Quang indicated would fully satisfy the Buddhists. In I Corps General Thi continues his speaking tour, drawing the usually enthusiastic response from a crowd of 5,000-10,000 persons.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Heavy fighting occurred last night between company-strength ARVN and Viet Cong forces northwest of Hue, the capital of northern coastal Thua Thien Province (Para. 1). USAF B-52 Stratofortresses early today attacked three separate Viet Cong/PAVN target complexes in the vicinity of A Shau Special Forces camp, in westernmost Thua Thien Province (Para. 2). Viet Cong road sabotage in coastal Phu Yen Province early today killed 15 Vietnamese civilian farmers and wounded four (Para. 3).

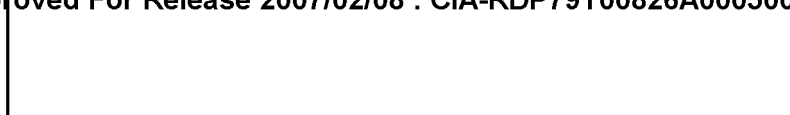
II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The ruling Directorate, after sounding out the Buddhists yesterday on possible compromises, apparently agreed among themselves today to adopt a firm stand against concessions to Buddhist demands (Paras. 1-3). Most of the major cities were quiet today except for Da Nang, where General Thi's presence again evoked considerable enthusiasm (Paras. 4-5). There are reports that the Buddhists are preparing a major mass meeting and a possible general strike in the Saigon area, but several prominent Vietnamese question the extent of popular support for the Buddhists (Paras. 6-7). The assassination of an Overseas Chinese in the Saigon area today, presumably at Viet Cong hands, appears to have increased anxiety among the Chinese community (Para. 8).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: A continuing review of [] photography reveals some

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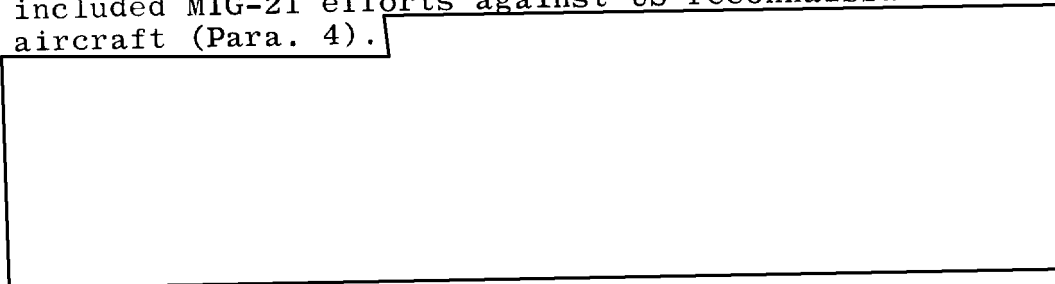
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[Redacted]
[Redacted] A US aircraft was downed by a SAM during operations over North Vietnam yesterday (Para. 3). DRV air activity over the last two days included MIG-21 efforts against US reconnaissance aircraft (Para. 4).



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IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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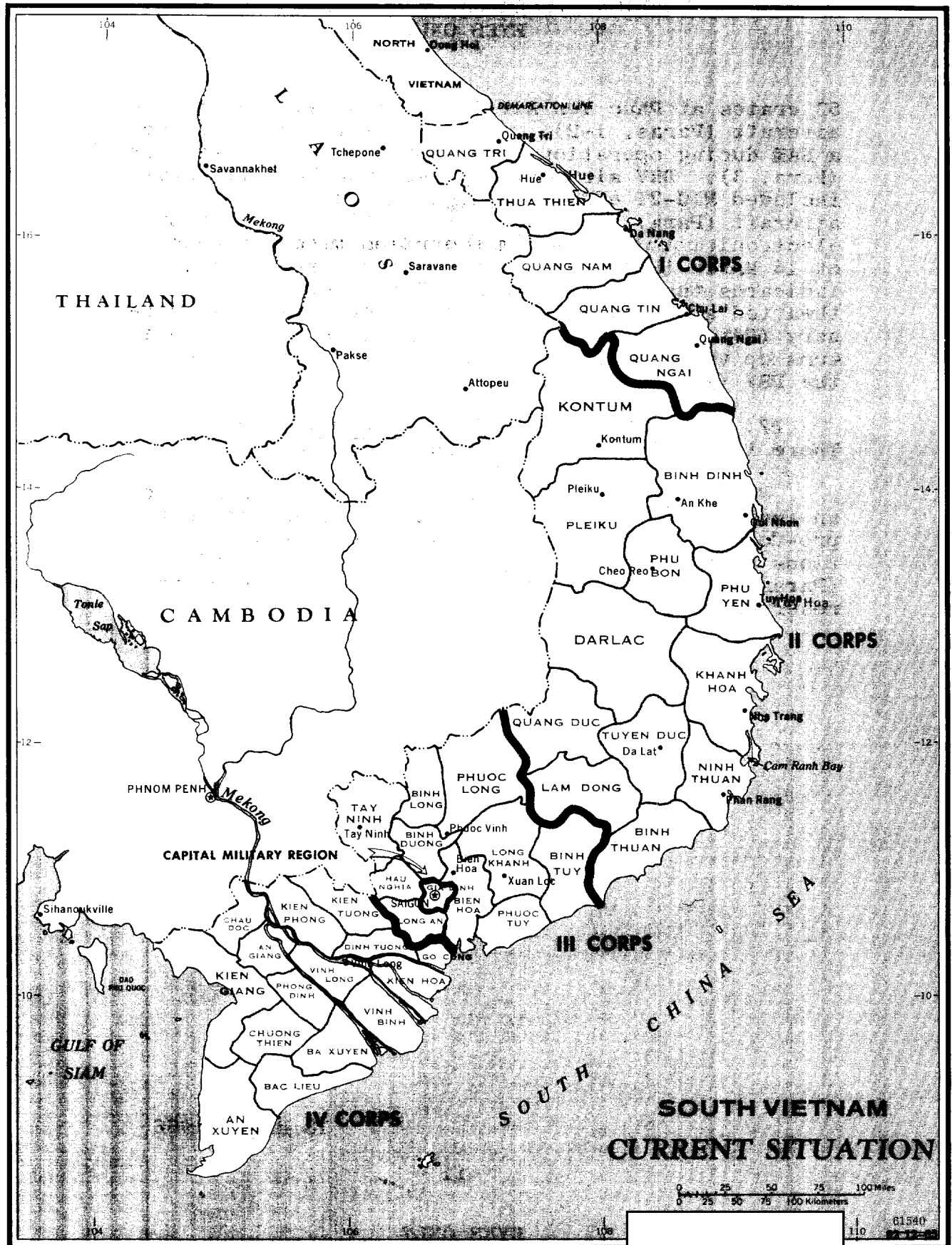
V. Communist Political Developments: Rumors of an imminent Sino-US war which are circulating among pro-Communists in Hong Kong/ [Redacted]

[Redacted] Peking propaganda again pledges "unreserved support" for Vietnam (Para. 5).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. In Thua Thien Province, 12 miles northwest of Hue, an ARVN company occupying a night blocking position on a known enemy infiltration route established contact with an estimated Viet Cong company which entered the area. In the two hour and 45 minute engagement that ensued, government forces, supported by flareships and artillery, killed 51 Viet Cong and captured 21 individual weapons, while sustaining friendly casualties of 14 wounded.

2. Eighteen USAF B-52 Stratofortresses early today attacked three separate enemy target complexes in the vicinity of A Shau Special Forces camp, in western Thua Thien Province. The target areas, located approximately 21 nautical miles southwest of Hue and from one to six nautical miles from the Laotian border, are believed to contain staging bases for the regimental-strength Viet Cong/PAVN forces which overran the A Shau garrison on 10 March. Poststrike ground intelligence sweeps of the drop zones are planned.

Viet Cong Activity

3. Fifteen South Vietnamese civilian farmers were reportedly killed and four wounded early today when a Viet Cong pressure mine exploded on a country road near Tuy Hoa, the capital of coastal Phu Yen Province. Some of the farmers were traveling in a small scooter bus and others on bicycles, apparently on their way to collect recently harvested rice stockpiles. The incident reportedly occurred less than a mile from the scene of a similar terrorist blast last month in which 37 civilian farmers were killed.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The ruling Directorate reached agreement today to adopt a hard line toward the political demands of the Buddhists, according to accounts of this morning's meeting in Saigon. There were evidently some differences among the generals present over how the Buddhists should be handled, but officers counseling against any concessions under Buddhist pressure prevailed. A communiqué issued on today's meeting merely "reaffirmed" the need to maintain unity within the army and between the army and the people in order to defeat the Communists, achieve a social revolution, and build democracy. This bland statement was intended by the Directorate to leave the door open for future accommodations if the Buddhists settle down.

2. Previously, government leaders had indicated that in consultation with ranking Buddhists yesterday they had discussed possible compromise formulas. Two plans were put forth by the government for speeding up the tempo of democratic evolution: 1) establishing the currently projected "democracy building" advisory council, with a majority of its membership to come from the existing elected provincial councils rather than to be hand-picked by the government as now envisaged; and 2) abandoning the advisory council in favor of an assembly, to be elected in late summer, for the purpose of drafting a constitution. As a result of the Directorate meeting today, both of these plans are being shelved for the time being.

3. Buddhist leader Tri Quang had told the US Embassy late yesterday that Chief of State Thieu and Premier Ky had earlier in the day met with Tam Chau and promised to announce the formation of a constituent assembly, presumably the second of the two plans. Quang indicated that this step would fully satisfy the Buddhists and put an end to the current political unrest. He warned, however, that if the government did not keep its promise, the Buddhists would react promptly and vigorously.

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4. Saigon and Hue were generally quiet today. In Da Nang, however, there was a partially successful general strike in the afternoon, coinciding with a meeting addressed by General Thi, who continues his personally successful tour of I Corps. Thi made no adverse comments about his Saigon military colleagues today, but he drew the usual enthusiastic response from a crowd of some 5,000-10,000 persons, a fifth of them military. Other speakers repeated the familiar Buddhist demands. A student meeting scheduled in Hue was reportedly canceled; it is unclear whether the cancellation was by order of local authorities or of the Buddhist hierarchy in anticipation of a settlement.

5. General Thi's two government escorts, Police Director Lieu and Military Security Service chief Loan, are reportedly due back in Saigon today, but latest reports indicate that Thi himself will remain in I Corps at least through 19 March. Meanwhile, Premier Ky has departed Saigon for the resort town of Dalat, where he expects to remain for at least part of the weekend. Ky's absence from Saigon is at least partly designed to demonstrate his unwillingness to undertake any further negotiations with the Buddhists while their pressure tactics continue.

25X1 [redacted] Ky is becoming increasingly impatient with the Buddhists, particularly Tri Quang.

6. There are a number of reports indicating that Buddhist circles in Saigon are gearing up for further political agitation, including a mass meeting tomorrow at the Buddhist Institute and possibly a general strike in the capital. The president of Saigon's leading labor union, the CVT, reportedly feels that the situation is becoming serious and is prepared to order CVT affiliates to rebuff political approaches. Two CVT representatives reportedly have been sent from Saigon to Da Nang, where they hope to put an end to pressure on workers to observe strike calls.

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7. The president of the Saigon municipal council, a southern Buddhist, has told an embassy officer he is becoming concerned about the Buddhist campaign, which he feels is a drive for a Buddhist-controlled government, and the likelihood that it will play into Communist hands. This source believes that the Buddhists lack the strength in Saigon to gain much headway, provided the government acts intelligently and firmly. Phan Quang Dan, another prominent councilman from surrounding Gia Dinh Province, has also expressed doubt that there is much real support either for the Buddhists or for General Thi, and believes that the government cannot be toppled provided it acts decisively. This view also appears to be held by a prominent Catholic leader, Father Lam, who commented that the Catholic leadership was determined to avoid being drawn into any dispute with the Buddhists. Former Premier Quat, however, has reportedly voiced the opinion that by ousting Thi, the Directorate has now upset the precarious equilibrium among the military on which stability has been based.

8. An Overseas Chinese was shot and killed early this morning in Cholon by a two-man assassination team. This is the third assassination in the Saigon area in recent months, apparently at Viet Cong hands. Today's victim reportedly had ties with a covert Chinese group attempting to identify Communist penetration of the Overseas Chinese community. The embassy reports that, coming on top of the government's execution of a Chinese speculator, the incident appears to have increased anxiety in Chinese circles.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. A sizable increase in the North Vietnamese MIG inventory is suggested by a continuing review of [redacted] drone photography of Phuc Yen Airfield

Air Operations Over North Vietnam

3. Another US aircraft was downed by a SAM in the central DRV coastal area on 18 March. SAMs, to date, have downed 17 US aircraft. The plane, a USMC EF-10 Skynight, was flying [redacted] about 45 miles southwest of Thanh Hoa when hit by the SAM. The status of the crew is unknown. This is the second SAM kill in the Vinh - Thanh Hoa area in the last two days

4. DRV MIG-21s have been employed on three occasions in the last two days against US aircraft. On 17 March the supersonic fighters reacted to a pair of US reconnaissance drones, but were unsuccessful in downing them. On the same day they reacted to a US U-2 reconnaissance aircraft, pursuing it into Laos before they broke off the chase. On 18 March, a MIG-21 made a vigorous attempt to intercept a US U-2 exiting the DRV near Haiphong, reaching at one point a speed of MACH 2, but this intercept was also unsuccessful.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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1. Rumors of an imminent Sino-US war which continue to circulate among pro-Communists in Hong Kong probably reflect alarmist stories circulated by the Chinese last month.

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5. Peking has once again pledged its "unreserved support" for the Vietnamese in a People's Daily editorial on 17 March commemorating the 16th anniversary of the Vietnamese "People's Struggle Against the US" and the "Week of Solidarity With the Vietnamese People." The editorial reiterated Peking's standard propaganda line in emphasizing the "brilliant victories" won by the Vietnamese and the alleged inevitable defeat of the US. In an apparent effort to deter the US from engaging in any military operations in Laos or Cambodia it declared that the US has aroused "not only the Vietnamese people but the Laotian and Cambodian people" to "resolute resistance by trying to extend the war to the rest of Indochina."

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